

The Environmental Education
Coordination Team
Announces the 6th annual
**Seagrass Awareness
Celebration!**



**March 25, 2006
Shoreline Park South, Gulf Breeze
10 am until 3 pm**

Families are encouraged to attend this hands-on learning event that concentrates on local marine resources. Activities will include: seining, dip netting, cast netting, learning casting skills, touch pools, arts and crafts, games, seagrass "egg" hunt and much more!

**Make plans now to attend the
Seagrass Awareness Celebration!!!!**

For more information about Seagrass Awareness Month and upcoming activities, please contact Chris Verlinde 623-3868, christinav@co.santa-rosa.fl.us, or Deborah Holland hollanddebbie@bellsouth.net.

This Seagrass Awareness initiative began in the Florida Keys in 1998 in response to an alarming increase in boater impacts to seagrass habitat in shallow water. Realizing that this was a statewide issue, the Florida Keys Seagrass Outreach Partnership (SOP) was formed, and the partnership worked with the governor's office to proclaim March 2001 as "Seagrass Awareness Month" in Florida. This initiative began as a tool to "spread the word" to help residents, visitors, and resource protection managers and educators better understand the important role seagrass communities play in the health of our marine ecosystem.

Seagrasses are a valuable part of the marine environment and support a thriving million-dollar fishery. Most commercial and recreationally important fish, crabs and shrimp spend some time of their lives in seagrass beds. These beds help to filter toxins from the water, contribute to water clarity by trapping suspended sediments, provide food and shelter for juvenile fish, shrimp and crabs, provide food for manatees, green sea turtles, and migratory birds depend on seagrass beds for foraging needs! Threats to these important resources include: degraded water quality, dredge and fill projects and physical impacts from boat propellers.

In our area, the "true" marine seagrass species include: shoal grass (*Halodule wrightii*), turtle grass (*Thalassia testudinum*), widgeon grass (*Ruppia maritima*), manatee grass (*Syringodium filiforme*), and some species of *Halophia*. In the upper parts of the bays, another ecologically important submerged aquatic plant is tape grass, (*Vallisneria americana*).

The term submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) is a general term that includes grasses found submerged in salt, brackish and fresh water environments.

"Seagrassit's alive" is the motto for this initiative. Get involved, and help spread the word about seagrasses this month! Be creative and provide educational opportunities for your friends, neighbors, fisher-people, boaters and those concerned about water quality.

Extension Service programs are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, age, handicap or national origin.

